

Shavua Tov

Weekly  Parsha

A Rood Awakening! Torah Commentary
By Glenn McWilliams

Torah Portion: *Chayei Sarah* חיי שרה "Sarah lived"

**Sarah had lived to be 127 years old.
[These were] the years of Sarah's life.**

**Vayihyu chayey Sarah me'ah shanah ve'esrim
shanah vesheva shanim shney chayey Sarah.**

Scripture for study: *Bereshit (Genesis) 23:1 - 25:18*

Our Torah portion this week may be one of the most ironically named portions. While the portion is named "Sarah Lived" it begins with her death, followed by the death of Abraham, and concludes with the death of Ishmael. While death appears to be a clear theme threading through this portion there is yet within the words of this portion much more about life. Let us begin by taking a closer look at the opening verses of our portion.

*"And Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old: these were the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died in Kirjath arba: the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her."
(Genesis 23:1-2)*

The King James English translation alludes to a truth that is made very clear in the Hebrew text. The Hebrew text literally reads as follows,

"And was alive Sarah a hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years, years alive Sarah"

First let us note the emphatic doubling of the statement that Sarah was alive. The emphasis is properly placed not on the fact that her life is over and the years of life are in the past, but that she lived. Twice in this brief sentence we are told that Sarah lived. Next we should note that the years of her life are broken down into three distinct groups of years; a hundred years, twenty years, and seven years. The sages make much about the fact that the Torah does not simply say she lived 127 years. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch points out that these are three

distinct ages of life; childhood, adulthood, and old age. (In that I myself am nearing the age of 50 I like the idea that old age begins at 100.) R. Hirsch teaches that this demonstrates that Sarah lived each of these three stages to their fullest and brought the blessing of each stage to impact upon the other. In other words, Sarah looked just as youthful in her adulthood as she did in her childhood, and she was just as innocent in her old age as she was in her adulthood.ⁱ Here we learn that the righteous recognize that each day is a gift from Elohim. For this reason the lives of the righteous are often counted in days instead of years.

“And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died:” (Genesis 5:5)

“And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years: and he died.” (Genesis 5:8)

“And all the days of Enos were nine hundred and five years: and he died.” (Genesis 5:11)

“And all the days of Cainan were nine hundred and ten years: and he died.” (Genesis 5:14)

“And all the days of Mahalaleel were eight hundred ninety and five years: and he died.” (Genesis 5:17)

“And all the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty and two years: and he died.” (Genesis 5:20)

“And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years:” (Genesis 5:23)

“And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years: and he died.” (Genesis 5:27)

“And all the days of Lamech were seven hundred seventy and seven years: and he died.” (Genesis 5:31)

“And all the days of Noach were nine hundred and fifty years: and he died.” (Genesis 9:29)

“And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran.” (Genesis 11:32)

“And these are the days of the years of Abraham’s life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years.” (Genesis 25:7)

“And the days of Isaac were an hundred and fourscore years, and Isaac gave up the spirit, and died...” (Genesis 35:28-29)

“And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.” (Genesis 47:9)

Note that in all of these examples the Torah counts not only the years but the days of their lives as well. We should also note that, with the exception of Enoch, all these men’s righteous life journeys ended in death. Thus the Torah does not hide the fact that even the righteous are mere mortals, suffering the fate of the sons of Adam. What sets these men (and women, as in the case of Sarah,) apart is that that they live each day and age to its fullest. There is no wasted time with them. There is no time free from the calling that the Creator placed upon their lives. Moses later warns and encourages the children of Israel;

“Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart, all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons. Specially the day that thou stoodest before YHWH thy Elohim in Horeb, when YHWH said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children.” (Deuteronomy 4:9-10)

“That thou mightest fear YHWH thy Elohim, to keep all his statutes and his commandments which I command thee thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged.” (Deuteronomy 6:2)

So we learn from the righteous lives displayed by our forefathers and mothers that we are to live each day to its fullest. We are to receive each day as a gift from the Creator to be experienced and utilized to its greatest capacity for good. But this does not simply mean that we are to grab a bottle of Miller beer and “go for the gusto!” Nor are we to simply “Carpe Diem”.ⁱⁱ There are many in the world that have entered the rat race trying to exploit every possible moment of life for their personal pleasure and gain. This is especially evident in our modern culture where business is conducted on cell phones and every moment of every day is spent commuting and communicating for the sake of our comfort and success. This is not the message of the Torah. So it is that Moses reminds us that we are a covenanted people. The lesson that we should draw from the days of the lives of our righteous ancestors is there is no time that we are not living for YHWH. The covenant of Sinai was a marriage between YHWH ELOHIM and the children of Israel. When we enter marriage to our spouse it is a life long commitment. Once we enter the marriage covenant we are married every moment of every day. Even when we are apart from our spouse we are still married, we are still accountable.

What we do, whether at home, or at work, or at play impacts upon the covenant relationship. As the children of Israel we are to submit our lives to the covenant. We are to realize that every day of every year of our lives are to be committed to fulfilling the special calling that YHWH has placed upon our lives: a calling that we willingly promised to fulfill. Understanding this calling will help us to understand the events of the rest of the portion.

We have declared many times the reality that YHWH ELOHIM has desired to make himself manifest in his creation. For this reason Elohim created man in his own image.

“And Elohim said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So Elohim created man in his own image, in the image of Elohim created he him; male and female created he them.” (Genesis 1:26-27)

“What is man that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than Elohim, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.” (Psalm 8:4-5)

It was man’s peculiar calling to be the manifest presence of Elohim in the world. So it is that we see that the living Elohim would not be embodied in wood, stone, brass, silver or gold.

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.” (Exodus 20:4)

“Ye shall make you no idols, nor graven images, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land to bow down unto it: For I am YHWH your Elohim.” (Leviticus 26:1)

The grave sin of the children of Israel at the base of Mount Sinai was that of misunderstanding the purpose of their calling. When Moses delayed in coming down from Mount Sinai the children of Israel grew restless and began looking for someone or something to focus their attention upon. They forged a golden calf.ⁱⁱⁱ Here we should remember that the Ancient Hebrew word picture for the name EL (spelled ALEPH LAMED) is a picture of an ox head and a shepherds crook. Every time the name EL was written a picture of an ox was drawn. It would only be natural that if the children of Israel were to cast an image of EL it would be that of an ox or calf. I believe it was the intention of the majority of the children of Israel to create an image of YHWH ELOHIM and not some other elohim. This view is supported by the words of Aaron who after the molten calf is finished declares, “Tomorrow is a feast to YHWH” (Exodus 32:5). The sin was that the children of Israel had not yet comprehended that the living Elohim cannot be embodied in something not living. Israel did not yet understand that they were to be the living tabernacle of the Holy One.

“And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.” (Exodus 25:8)

“Yeshua answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up... But he spake of the temple of his body.” (John 2:19, 21)

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of Elohim and that the Spirit of Elohim dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of Elohim, him shall Elohim destroy; for the temple of Elohim is holy, which temple ye are.” (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

“And what agreement hath the temple of Elohim with idols? For ye are the temple of the living Elohim: as Elohim hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their Elohim, and they shall be my people.” (2 Corinthians 6:16)

The calling upon the children of Israel is that by living the Torah, (the revelation of YHWH), they will embody the image of the living Elohim. The children of Israel are to be the living image of the living Elohim. Once we have crossed over into this covenant agreement, that we will bear the living Torah, the image of the living Elohim, we are to do so every moment of every day. We cannot put it on and off. We cannot stand and claim to be a light to the world one day, and then be dark to the world for the next few days. We are covenanted to be the image of YHWH. The righteous understand what they have crossed into, and live each day fully for YHWH ELOHIM. By living the Torah they become the image of living Elohim.

We should also recognize in this that death has no part in the living Elohim. Thus our ancestors lived everyday of every year righteously being the image of Elohim. But upon their death they are no longer in the image of Elohim. It is for this reason that Abraham sought to quickly bury Sarah. Death does not belong to the image of YHVW. Death is the fruit and wages of sin.

“And YHWH ELOHIM commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Genesis 2:16-17)

“For the wages of sin is death;” (Romans 6:23)

Death belongs to the realm of TAMEI.^{iv} The Torah teaches us that death belongs to those things that are not useful for being the image of Elohim. Death defiles the image of the living Elohim. Elohim is eternal, we are not. Our usefulness as the image of the Eternal One ends with our death. Therefore the Torah places death in the realm of TAMEI.

“And YHWH said unto Moses, speak unto the priests the sons of Aaron, and say unto them, There shall none be defiled for the dead among his people:” (Leviticus 21:1)

“And he that is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes; Neither shall he go in to any dead body, nor defile himself for his father, or his mother,” (Leviticus 21:10-11)

“Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper and every one that hath an issue and whosoever is defiled by the dead.” (Numbers 5:2)

“And if any man die very suddenly by him, and he hath defiled the head of his consecration; then he shall shave his head in the day of his cleansing, on the seventh day shall he shave it.” (Numbers 6:9)

"And there were certain men, who were defiled by the dead body of a man, that they could not keep the Passover on that day: "(Numbers 9:6)

"And those men said unto him, WE are defiled by the dead body of a man;" (Numbers 9:7)

"He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days." (Numbers 19:11)

"Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of YHWH; that soul shall be cut off from Israel;" (Numbers 19:13)

Please take note that death defiles. Please also note that the one who touches the body of anyone dead and does not purify himself defiles the tabernacle. We have already established that we are the tabernacle of the living Elohim. In other words we are to put off death from among us. Again death has no place in the image of Elohim. We see this strongly substantiated in the judgment of death given against certain acts of men that in fact desecrate the living image of the living Elohim. I will for convenience sake list a number of these examples and let you draw the connection between the grievous act deserving death and the desecration of the living image of Elohim.

"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of Elohim made he man." Genesis 9:6)

"He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death." (Exodus 21:12 cp. Leviticus 24:17, 21; Numbers 35:16-18,21)

"And he that smiteth his father or mother, shall be surely put to death." (Exodus 21:15)

"And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death." (Exodus 21:17 cp. Leviticus 20:9)

"Whosoever lieth with a beast shall surely be put to death." (Exodus 22:19 cp. Leviticus 20:15-16)

"Ye shall keep the Sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people" (Exodus 31:14)

"Again, thou shalt say to the children of Israel, Whosoever he be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth any of his seed unto Molech; he shall surely be put to death;" (Leviticus 20:2)

"And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death." (Leviticus 20:10)

“And the man that lieth with his father’s wife hath uncovered his father’s nakedness: both of them shall surely be put to death;” (Leviticus 20:11)

“If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death.” (Leviticus 20:13)

“A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death.” (Leviticus 20:27)

“And he that blasphemeth the name of YHWH, he shall surely be put to death” (Leviticus 24:16)

“And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from YHWH your Elohim” (Deuteronomy 13:5)

And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death and he be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of Elohim;) that thy land be not defiled, which YHWH thy Elohim giveth thee for an inheritance.” (Deuteronomy 21:22-23).

Clearly we should see a connection between death and the desecration of the image of YHWH ELOHIM. Again it is for this reason that Abraham seeks to quickly bury his wife Sarah from before his eyes and the eyes of all who see her. Death exposes us all as sinners. Sin and Death have no place in the image of YHWH. Sin and Death remind us all that we are not YHWH ELOHIM merely his manifested presence. No matter how magnificently we may have kept the Torah in our life time, death still exposes us for what we are; Spirit filled dust.^v To remove this fallen image quickly from before the eyes of others is a great mitzvah. By removing the lifeless image of a person quickly, we allow their righteous legacy to continue as an example and testimony to others. So it is that Abraham by securing a place to bury Sarah honored her living testimony. We should take careful note that Abraham was not content with merely removing the corpse of Sarah from before his eyes. If this was the case then Abraham would have quickly accepted the offer of the sons of Heth and simply buried Sarah in their sepulchers.

“And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.” (Genesis 23:3-4)

Note that Abraham reminds them that he is a stranger and sojourner among them. Here we learn that a sojourner and stranger do not own land. Without land Abraham is at their mercy for such needs as a burying place. By asking for such a place, Abraham is declaring that it is his intention to remain among them. The sons of Heth respect Abraham, speak highly of him, and make him a very generous offer.

“And the children of Heth answered Abraham, saying unto him, Hear us my lord: thou art a mighty prince among us; in the choice of our sepulchers bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulcher, but that thou mayest bury thy dead.” (Genesis 23:5-6)

The sons of Heth pay Abraham a great compliment, and also give us a revelation about the righteousness of Abraham. In the Hebrew they do not call Abraham a mighty prince, but an exalted ELOHIM! Clearly, Abraham was living the Torah in their midst. Because of this the sons of Heth offer Abraham their own sepulchers for use. Here we must understand the burying customs of the middle east. When a person died, their relatives would anoint the body with herbs and spices and wrap it in layers of linen cloth. This was not to preserve the body, but simply to make the decomposition of the flesh less pungent. A sepulcher or tomb was generally comprised of two sections. Within the first section was a table or niche carved into the rock to receive the body. A small hole to the outside, called a nefesh hole (soul hole) was also present to allow air to circulate (and the soul to ascend). In a short time the body would be completely decomposed leaving only the bones remaining. At this point the family of the deceased would enter the tomb gather up the bones and stack them with the bones of all their previously deceased relatives. This is where the expression “Gathered to your fathers” comes from. Had Abraham accepted the proposal of the children of Heth it would have meant that eventually Sarah’s bones would be gathered among the ancestors of the Canaanite Heth. This would never do. Abraham understood that he was called to be separate from the nations. It is for this reason that he remained a sojourner and stranger among them. Abraham never assimilated into any of the cultures he lived among. Now, even in death, Sarah would not be gathered unto the Canaanites. This separation would likewise become important later in the portion when Abraham sends his servant elsewhere to find a wife for Isaac and forbids him from taking a wife from among the Canaanites.

“And I will make thee swear by YHWH the Elohim of heaven and the Elohim of earth that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites.” (Genesis 24:3)

This separation and prohibition are quite understandable when it comes to finding a wife for Isaac. The Canaanites are idolatrous and lewd people. We should understand, however, that the Babylonians and Chaldeans were likewise an idolatrous people. But Babylon and Chaldea was far away. If Isaac married a Canaanite woman, she would be surrounded by her family who would encourage her to keep her faith. Since her family and culture would surely outnumber Isaac’s small family, the chances of her prevailing to influence Isaac to join her culture and religion would be great. But, if Isaac’s wife came from a distance then she would not be surrounded by and encouraged by her family and would be more willing to submit to Isaac and his faith. For this reason Abraham forbid his servant to choose a wife from among the Canaanites, or from taking Isaac back to Chaldea. So it is understandable that Abraham demands separation from the Canaanites when choosing a wife for his son, but why maintain this separation in the matter of Sarah’s death?

The answer to this question is two fold. First let us recall who the Canaanites are. The Canaanites are the descendants of Ham’s son to his mother.^{vi} The Canaanites are a cursed line.

“And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed by Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.” (Genesis 9:25)

Abraham’s line is through the blessed line of Shem, and is therefore blessed. Beyond this, Abraham had received the promise and covenant that YHWH would indeed bless him and his seed after him. To allow his son to marry a Canaanite would be to mix the seed. This is something expressly forbidden in the Torah.

“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Genesis 2:17)

“Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown and the fruit of thy vineyard, be defiled.” (Deuteronomy 22:9)

Thus in life and in death Abraham assures that there shall be no counting of the righteous among the wicked. Abraham and Sarah were called to be separate. Thus even in death the children of Israel are to have no part with the wicked.

The second reason for Abraham to purchase a burying-place for Sarah and himself, in the land of Canaan is so that Abraham’s descendants’ hearts will be forever drawn to this land. While the Canaanites and others currently inhabit the land Abraham knows that this land has been promised to his descendants forever.

“For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever.” (Genesis 13:15)

“And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, and all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their Elohim.” (Genesis 17:8)

Prior to this purchase Abraham had been called to be a sojourner and stranger in the land of promise.

“Arise and walk, through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.” (Genesis 13:17)

Now with this purchase Abraham owns a piece of the promise land. It should be noted that Abraham did not accept this piece of land as a gift, but purchased it for a substantial price.

“And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, for a hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant.” (Genesis 23:16)

We should also note that there are three such land purchases in the Tanak that establish that fact that Israel is clearly the undisputed owner of the land. The first piece of land is the cave at Machpelah purchased by Abraham for a burying-place. Machpelah is now known as Hebron. The second piece of property purchased in the promise land was a camp sight in Shechem, now known as Nablus.

“And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan-aram; and pitched his tent before the city. And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem’s father, for an hundred pieces of money. And he erected there an altar and called it El-elohe-Israel.” (Genesis 33:18-20)

The third piece of property purchased in the promise land mentioned in the Tanak is that of the threshing floor of Ornan. David purchased this piece of property for the building of the Temple.

“And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it fro the full price: for I will not take that which is thine YHWH, nor offer burnt offerings without cost. So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight.” (1 Chronicles 21:24-25)

Clearly the children of Israel have purchased these three pieces of property fairly, legally and at full price. Sadly however, all three of these areas are on what amounts to occupied land. Shechem and Hebron are clearly within what the United Nations deems to be Palestinian territories, and the Temple mount is under the control of Palestinian Muslims. We must grieve this sad state of affairs and pray that all the children of Israel will repent of their rebellion, that the Messiah will return soon, that the Temple will be rebuilt and that the land of Torah will again be ruled by Torah.

Maybe this is the message of Sarah’s life and death. That if the children of Israel, gratefully and faithfully live each day of our lives fulfilling the calling to be the image of Elohim in the world by keeping the Torah, then and only then shall we be allowed to return to the land of promise and enter into our rest.

“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:14)

“Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways; Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.” (Psalm 95:8-11)

“For YHWH hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.” (Psalm 132:13-14)

SHAVUA TOV !

ⁱ The Pentateuch, Samson Raphael Hirsch, The Judaica Press, Pg. 110

ⁱⁱ Latin for Seize the Day.

ⁱⁱⁱ Exodus 32:1-35

^{iv} TAMEI is the Hebrew word translated as UNCLEAN

^v Genesis 3:19; John 3:6

^{vi} See my teaching of Torah Portion Noach. Genesis 9:22